DAVID's *choice, to fall into the hand of* GOD, *rather than into the hand of man,*

Considered in a

SERMON

PREACHED at

HAND-ALLEY *in* London,

October the 20th, 1721.

BEING THE

Anniversary of his MAJESTY'S CORONATION.

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By *JOHN EVANS.*

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2 SAM. XXIV. 14.

And David *ſaid unto* Gad, *I am in a great ſtrait; Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great,) and let me not fall into the hand of man.*

IN the context we find *David* giving orders to number the people of *Iſrael*, and that God was highly provoked by it. *David* after the fact confeſſes, that *he had ſinned greatly* therein, *ver.* 10. And God in a very awful manner expreſſes his diſpleaſure at it. We are not particularly told in the relation, wherein the evil of it lay. Interpreters have ſuggeſted ſeveral probable accounts of it. But after having conſidered each of them, I chuſe to acquieſce in the common ſolution, that *David* did this out of vanity and pride, made fleſh his arm, and confided in the numbers of his people: And as God was afterwards diſpleaſed with *Hezekiah* for ſhewing his treaſures to the Ambaſſadors of the King of *Babylon* out of the ſame oſtentatious

and vain-glorious humour, ſo he was here with *David*.

It muſt be obſerved alſo, that God had a former controverſy with the people of *Iſrael*; which is intimated at the beginning of the relation in ver. 1. *And again the anger of the Lord was kindled againſt Iſrael, and he moved David againſt them to ſay, Go, number Iſrael and Judah.* How we are to underſtand that Hebraiſm of *God's moving David againſt them*, may appear by comparing the relation given in the book of *Chronicles*, 1 *Chron.* xxi. 1. where we are told, that *Satan ſtood up againſt Iſrael, and provoked David to number Iſrael.* The meaning cannot be, that God ſolicited *David* to commit this ſin: That was the Devil's work, and not God's: So *God tempteth no man*, Jam. i. 13. But the great enemy of God and goodneſs ſuggeſted the thought to his mind, as he put it into the heart of *Judas* to betray Chriſt. And God having a former controverſy with the people of *Iſrael* for other provocations, as a righteous judge, permitted Satan to do ſo, and *David*'s ambition to take fire without the ſpecial interpoſal of his own influences to prevent the bad effect; with a view of taking that occaſion to puniſh thoſe ſins of his people, for which he might juſtly have puniſhed them without this.

David then having ordered and executed this piece of needleſs vanity, has a meſſage ſent him from God by the Prophet *Gad*; who is called *David*'s *Seer*, *i. e.* a Prophet, whom he had much with him, and with whom he was uſed to adviſe in difficult caſes: Upon which *his*

heart

heart ſmote him. Conſidering what he had done, and reflecting upon the temper of his own heart therein, he lies down under a juſt conviction, humbly confeſſes his ſin before God, and humbly ſues for a pardon.

The meſſage brought him was a very melancholy one. Three ſore judgments were propoſed to his choice, either a ſeven years famine, or flying three months before his enemies, or a three days Peſtilence. And tho' *David* was himſelf become a true penitent, yet God was not prevailed with to avert the ſtroke. The people had offended too, as was before obſerved; God was angry with them, and there was no ſign of their repentance; therefore God was determined to puniſh them. The ſentence was gone forth. The three judgments here mentioned, the ſword, and peſtilence, and famine, as they are ſome of the ſoreſt outward evils that can befall a people, ſo we find each of them more than once predicted to *Iſrael* by the prophets, and ſometimes together; as in *Jer.* xxxiv. 17. *I proclaim a liberty for you, ſaith the Lord, to the ſword, to the peſtilence, and to the famine.* And they were all of them very ſuitable teſtimonies of God's diſpleaſure in the preſent caſe. If *David*'s ſin was, that he was proud of the numbers of his people, any of theſe calamities would ſhew him to purpoſe, how eaſily God could make *Jacob* thin: And when God's original controverſy was with the people, the puniſhment was fitly to be of ſuch a nature, as that the people ſhould have a large ſhare in it.

Now

Now as in *ver.* 10. we had an account of *David*'s frame in reference to his own perſonal guilt; the Text repreſents his temper and ſentiments in reference to the awful propoſal made him.

1. We find him in a difficulty. *I am in a great ſtrait.* We may eaſily ſuppoſe him to feel a ſtrong convulſion within himſelf upon ſo affecting an occaſion; what between a penitent compunction for his ſin, a tender concern for his people, a cutting apprehenſion of God's diſpleaſure, and tremendous thoughts of all theſe dreadful judgments. Every one of them would ſtrike deep upon a human and a holy mind. And when the fate of ſo many was like to depend upon his choice, we cannot conceive that his mind could be without a deep concern, leſt by miſtake he ſhould chuſe to their diſadvantage. But ſince God demanded his anſwer,

2. We have him coming to a determination. *Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great,) and let me not fall into the hand of man.* He ſeems herein to leave it to God to ſend either famine or peſtilence, for both thoſe calamities come more directly from God's hand; and only to deſire, that he might not be delivered to the will of his enemies. As if he had ſaid, Lord, I would not pretend to determine between famine and peſtilence; I only beg, ſince thou haſt put it to my option, that I and my people may rather be dealt with in either of the ways, which will more immediately be thy hand, than be given up to the mercy of ſavage enemies.

The

The buſineſs of this diſcourſe ſhall be, 1*ſt*, More particularly to explain *David*'s choice. 2*dly*, To juſtify it: And, 3*dly*, To improve it.

I. It may be proper a little more diſtinctly to explain this choice, which *David* made. To that end I would offer the following particulars.

1. We are not to ſuppoſe, that *David* would rather fall under the *wrath* of God, than the wrath of man. He knew too well the infinite diſproportion, which there is between theſe. No doubt he had a ſerious apprehenſion of what *Moſes* long before had ſaid, *Pſal.* xc. 11. *Who knows the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, ſo is thy wrath.* Nor can we ſuppoſe him altogether inſenſible, what a vaſt reach God could take in his vengeance beyond the greateſt of men; that if they can *kill the body, after that they have no more that they can do*; but that *God has power* not only over our temporal lives, but *to caſt into hell*, Luke xii. 4, 5. And that therefore *it is a fearful thing*, the moſt fearful of all others, *to fall into the hands of the living God*, to feel the full effects of his indignation, *Heb.* x. 31. He knew, for he has declared ſo, *Pſal.* ii. 12. that *if God's anger be kindled but a little, we ſhould ſoon periſh from the way.* Certainly, if the choice propoſed to him had been between the diſpleaſure of God and the diſpleaſure of men, ſo knowing, ſo pious a man as he was would have choſen to venture the rage of the whole creation, rather than to have God for his enemy. Here there could have been

been no room for a rational debate; much leſs for a calm determination, rather to fall into the hand of God than of men.

2. When he oppoſes the hand of God to the hand of man, we are not to underſtand him, as if he thought, that the hand of God is not concerned in thoſe evils, whereof men are the immediate inſtruments. He was far from being ſo irreligious, as to think that the providence of God had not a concern in the judgments which men are imployed in executing, as well as in thoſe which are more immediately brought upon us by himſelf. He was not to learn, that God has a hand and a voice in the calamities, which come upon a people by the violence, and injuſtice, and craft of their wicked enemies, as well as in famine and peſtilence: That if *the Aſſyrian* were the miniſter of puniſhment, yet he would be *the rod of God's anger, and the ſtaff in his hand* would be *God's indignation:* That God was to be conſidered as *ſending him againſt an hypocritical nation, and giving him a charge againſt the people of his wrath*; *tho'* the Aſſyrian *meant not ſo, neither did his heart think ſo, but it was in his heart to deſtroy and to cut off nations not a few*, Iſa. x. 5, 6, 7. He that had an eye to God in a taunt and reproach caſt upon him by *Shimei*, could not intend to exclude the conſideration of God in ſufferings, which he or his people might fall under by the outrages of an inſulting enemy. No, when he puts up a prayer againſt his enemies, he pathetically acknowledges this, *Pſal.* xvii. 13, 14. *Deliver my ſoul from the wicked, which is thy ſword; From men, which are thy hand, O Lord.*

Lord. He knew, that the worſt men could not have power againſt him, unleſs it were given them from above; that the voice of God was in all their ill uſage; and that all the wrath of man was under his reſtraint. The very propoſal made to him carried a plain intimation of this. All theſe judgments muſt be alike in the hand of God, to bring them on, or ſtave them off, as he pleaſed; or elſe it could not have been put to his choice, which of them ſhould be the puniſhment of him and his people. But —

3. The plain and obvious meaning is, that he rather thought it a thing fit to be choſen, if God ſhould pleaſe, that he and his people ſhould fall under ſuch temporal puniſhments for their ſins, as God might more immediately and entirely direct himſelf, than to have all the malice and wickedneſs of cruel enemies let looſe upon them. If God had choſen that way of teſtifying his diſpleaſure, it would have become him to ſubmit: But ſince God was pleaſed to put it to his choice, he had rather that he and his people ſhould be under God's correction than under man's cruelty. My next work will be,

II. To juſtify this choice, or to offer ſome reaſons to ſhew, how wiſely and fitly he turned the balance this way.

I ſhall not ſay, that all, which I am about to ſuggeſt upon this head, was actually in the thought of *David*, when he came to this determination. But I hope it will appear, that any of them would bear him out in his judgment, and eſpecially all of them laid together.

1. This way he might expect the moſt impartial juſtice. When the extravagant paſſions of ill men, eſpecially their luſt of power, are let looſe, juſtice is hardly at all conſidered. They aim at nothing better than the gratification of their ambition or covetouſneſs, the ſatiating of their revenge, or the venting of their cruel inclination. Every one, that ſtands in their way, is like promiſcuouſly to feel their reſentment; and all the meaſures of equity to be confounded. But when God takes the work into his own hands, his proceedings are like to be more exact. When he was about to deſtroy *Sodom*, *Abraham* pleads with him, *Gen.* xviii. 25. *That be far from thee, to do after this manner, to ſlay the righteous with the wicked*; —— *ſhall not the judge of all the earth do right?* Poſſibly *David*, who was now brought to repentance, might have ſomewhat of this in his thoughts, that when God drew the ſword himſelf, it would be chiefly againſt thoſe who were moſt guilty: And under a ſenſe of his own ſin, which was the immediate occaſion of the judgment to be inflicted, might make this his deſire in a way of interceſſion for his people. Let us rather fall under the peſtilence than any other judgment, becauſe this is peculiarly thy hand: That is a ſtroke, to which I and my family lie as open as the meaneſt ſubject; whereas the famine or the ſword may not be ſo likely to reach them. And, therefore, from a conſciouſneſs of his guilt he might fix his choice there. Or if he were ſenſible of the anger of God againſt his people in general, he might expect a juſter diſ-

crimination to be made among them, according to what they were, when God undertook the work himſelf, than when men were his executioners.

2. When men are God's inſtruments of judgment, the righteous ſoul of a good man has the additional vexation of their ſin and wickedneſs. In evils inflicted by God's more immediate hand, he has only the outward evil to humble himſelf under, and the ſins of himſelf and the other ſufferers which brought down thoſe judgments. But when wicked men are the executioners, their ſins give a farther vexation. To ſee them purſuing the luſts of their heart, breaking thro' all bonds civil or ſacred, diſcovering their pride and arrogance, their inſatiable cruelty, their baſe perfidiouſneſs; to hear them ſetting their mouths againſt the heavens, and boaſting themſelves in miſchief; this is a freſh wound to a pious mind. An apprehenſion of this would induce ſuch a man to deprecate judgments by ſuch hands, if it pleaſe God.

3. When ill men ſucceed againſt a profeſſing people, their ſucceſſes generally endanger the intereſt of true religion, as well as the civil welfare of ſuch a people. When God puniſhes ſuch a people with his own hand, ſuppoſe by a famine, by peſtilential diſtempers; this leaves their religious intereſts untouched, and has an immediate tendency to awaken them to ſerious thoughts, to repentance and reformation. But when the enemies of God's church are ſuffered to prevail, this threatens the removal of the candleſtick out of its place. If they have their wills,

the cauſe of God among ſuch a people ſhall be ruined. *David*, who had ſo great a love to the worſhip and ordinances of God, might very naturally have this in his thoughts, as a danger from any of the neighbouring nations round about *Iſrael*. He might remember how the *Philiſtines* carried away the ark, and he knew that the enmity of them, and of the other potentates around them, was as much founded in their implacable malice againſt their religion, as in any thing elſe. And, therefore, as one that trembled for the ark of God, he might incline to this choice. He reckoned they might do ſo much damage to the intereſts of true religion in three months, (the time propoſed for that judgment,) as could not be repaired in many years: And therefore inclined rather to that which he thought ſafeſt for the church of God.

4. It would in it ſelf be a greater abaſement to them to be delivered into the power of their proud enemies, than to fall under the rebukes of God. Proud indeed is that ſpirit, which thinks much to ſtoop to the great God. But to be made a ſervant of ſervants; to have thoſe to domineer over them, whom they had frequently conquered; to become the ſlaves of ſuch as had no right to give law to them; this would be an abaſing mortification indeed, a circumſtance which would add no ſmall weight to the burthen that they muſt actually feel.

And *laſtly*, there is the conſideration which is particularly expreſſed in the text,

5. Divine

5. Divine mercy made it unſpeakably more eligible to fall into his hands than into the hands of men. *For his mercies are great.*

If the human inſtruments of our puniſhment ſhould be of the mildeſt temper, and of the ſofteſt diſpoſition poſſible, yet they are by no means to be compared with the mercy of God; which, like all his other perfections, is infinite and unparallelled. *Who is a God like unto him, that pardoneth iniquity, and paſſeth by the tranſgreſſion of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, becauſe he delighteth in mercy*, Mic. vii. 18. But the enemies, of which *David* muſt be apprehenſive, were people of quite another character: He knew from many inſtances in his own time, and in former days, their ſavage tempers, their lawleſs violence, and their implacable hatred. He knew, that *the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel*, Prov. xii. 10. The beſt he could expect at their hands, was but ſome inſtance or other of cruelty.

God's judgments upon a people are deſigned for their good: But their enemies often aim at their ruin: 'Tis in their heart to deſtroy and to cut off.

God in the midſt of judgment remembers mercy, and does not ſtir up all his wrath. But wicked men do evil as they can; they hardly think they can do enough to ſatiate their revenge, to abuſe thoſe that have ſtood in their way, and to ſecure them under their power.

God is ready to remove or leſſen his judgments upon repentance. But ill men would, if they could, go on to perſecute the church of God,

even

even when he is reconciled to them. It is a remarkable expreſſion of divine mercy and human malice, which we have in the words of God by the prophet *Zechariah*, Chap. i. 14, 15, 16. *I am jealous for Jeruſalem, and for Zion, with great jealouſy. And I am very ſore diſpleaſed with the heathen that are at eaſe; for I was but a little diſpleaſed, and they helped forward the affliction. Therefore thus ſaith the Lord, I am returned to Jeruſalem with mercies.* There was an intimation of God's returning in mercy by his propoſing the peſtilence only for *three days*. 'Tis true God could have ſwept them away with his ſtroke in that time; but that would not be according to the uſual method of his providence: It rather intimated a ſhort, tho' a ſharp viſitation deſigned. And as now *David* was conſcious to himſelf of his own repentance, he had the more ground to expect, that mercy would moderate the judgment, which was to be inflicted by God's own hand. And ſo we find it did, ver. 16. *And when the angel ſtretched out his hand upon Jeruſalem to deſtroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and ſaid to the angel that deſtroyed the people, It is enough, ſtay now thine hand.*

I now come in the laſt place,

III. To make ſome improvement of this paſſage ſuitable to our own caſe. And,

1. We may learn from it, for our own inſtruction, that after ſignal benefits and deliverances granted to a people, God has often a further controverſy with them. After all that God had wrought

wrought for *David*, and by him for the people of *Iſrael*, yet again the anger of the Lord was kindled againſt *Iſrael*. Whether this provocation of theirs was, their unthankfulneſs for the bleſſings of *David*'s government; or their readineſs to ſide with pretenders againſt him, ſuch as *Abſalom*, and after him *Sheba* the Son of *Bichri*; or their abuſing their peace and plenty to ſecurity and ſenſuality: The particular provocation, I ſay, of the people is not mentioned. But it is plain, that after all the favours of his providence God had yet a reckoning with them. And have not we reaſon to entertain like apprehenſions? Tho' God has delivered us once and again by the moſt ſurprizing diſplays of his power and providence; yet, for all this, his anger may not be turned away, but his hand be ſtretched out ſtill. Tho' he may have granted us eminent ſalvations, yet there may be a ſcore of old guilt yet uncancelled, and a new ſcore contracted ſince our deliverances, both of them yet to be reckoned for, if we perſiſt in thoſe ſins, which have heretofore brought us to the brink of ruin.

2. We are taught to eſteem malignant and peſtilential diſtempers as eminently the hand of God. So *David* here emphatically ſtiles them. They ſpring up at firſt by the inviſible influence of his providence on the air and elements; and the utmoſt skill of the phyſicians to this day has not been able, certainly, to aſſign the natural cauſe of them. They come with his commiſſion; are directed to the quarters where they ſhall make deſolation; they fulfil his will, and obey his word; and for time, and degree, and effects are under his

controul

controul and conduct. Some years ago, as in *Exod.* ix. 3. *The hand of the Lord was upon the cattle.* Now it is in a neighbouring kingdom upon great numbers of people. God expects from us the ſerious and religious acknowledgment of his hand herein, and may well be expected to make examples of us, if he be not ſuitably owned by us.

3. We ſhould be very thankful, that God has preſerved us from falling into the hands of men. This happy day of his Majeſty's Coronation leads us particularly to this thought. Let us remember, how near we thought our ſelves to be delivered into the hands of our *Popiſh* enemies before his Majeſty's peaceable acceſſion, and what ſentiments we then had of our danger and our deliverance. How dreadful did we then apprehend it to be, to be delivered up to *Popiſh* cruelty? And, ſurely, with the greateſt reaſon. *Popiſh* cruelty is written in characters of blood, where-ever it has prevailed. The beſt-natured men among them are transformed, by their religion, into the moſt ſavage and blood-thirſty temper towards *Proteſtants*. Men who ſeem in other reſpects religious and vertuous, are often the moſt furious zealots againſt a *Proteſtant*, that comes in their way. And no wonder, for when they kill us, they think they do God good ſervice. If *Popery* had come in upon us, not only our liberty to ſerve God in our way free from the ceremonies we think needleſs in the eſtabliſhment, but to ſerve him in any way free from idolatry, muſt have been taken from us. Nor could we have expected any ſecurity for our civil rights and privileges,

vileges, if our kingdom had been made a province of our neighbours, under the government and at the mercy of a bigotted Devotee of *Rome*. We were all ſenſible, what we had to look for, if that poor pretender to our crown had been brought in upon us, fired with reſentment for all his ſuppoſed ill uſage, and in thoſe needy circumſtances for himſelf and his creatures, and under ſuch obligations to him who had ſo long harboured him, as muſt have ſwallowed up our treaſure, and ſwept away our eſtates, in a more diſtreſſing manner than even our late follies have done.

We were once full of the ſenſe of this danger; we mourned, we prayed under the apprehenſion of it. And when God prevented our fears by a ſurprize of providence, conducting our Proteſtant Sovereign peaceably to the throne, *we were like them that dream.* We praiſed God, we congratulated one another, our hearts breathed entire affection to our gracious Prince. I hope we are all ſtill animated with the ſame ſentiments; for by the good hand of our God, and the ſubordinate care of his Majeſty, we yet have a ſafe poſſeſſion of our religion and liberties, and all the ſymptoms of ſecurity from the attempts of our *Popiſh* enemies. If there ſhould be found among us any ſo ungrateful to God, and ſo inſenſible of their true intereſts, as to be cooled in their value for theſe great bleſſings; either becauſe of the preſent difficulties which ſome feel, and which I doubt moſt have brought upon themſelves by their own avarice or raſhneſs; or becauſe of their fears of a peſtilence:

Inſtead of having any good reaſon to change their minds, I doubt they will find, that they only inflame the reckoning, when God ſhall come to contend with them. It may be worth the ſerious conſideration of all, who give this turn to their preſent diſtreſſes, that God particularly threatned the *Iſraelites* for a like murmuring and ingratitude with that very calamity, which we are now in fear of, the peſtilence. In *Numb.* xiv. 2, 3, 4. we find their murmurs upon the report of difficulties in the way to *Canaan*, which was made by thoſe appointed to view the land: *Would God*, ſay they, *we had died in the land of Egypt, or in this wilderneſs. Wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the ſword? —— Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.* We may ſee how God reſents the provocation, *ver.* 11, 12. *How long will this people provoke me? —— I will ſmite them with the peſtilence.* I ſhall therefore conclude this head with the apoſtle's advice upon the review of their ſtory, 1 *Cor.* x. 10. *Neither murmure ye, as ſome of them alſo murmured, and were deſtroyed of the deſtroyer.*

4. We have reaſon to magnify Divine patience, that we *are* not yet fallen into *his hand*, by the peſtilence it ſelf. That the contagion did not firſt arrive upon our coaſt, ſo as to ſet us up for a warning to our neighbours: That while it hath made ſuch ſlaughter in ſeveral cities and villages of *France* for a year paſt, we are yet reprieved; tho' a ſingle ſhip, a ſingle perſon, or a ſingle commodity might have been ſufficient to waft over the infection. I believe all of you

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are convinced, that the moſt prudent precautions taken by our Rulers, all the art and care of man, all the lines that can be drawn, cannot be an effectual ſecurity; and that we are principally indebted, for ſo long a reſpite, to the care of the great *watchman of* our *Iſrael, who neither ſlumbers nor ſleeps.*

And certainly his goodneſs and long-ſuffering are very conſpicuous in ſparing us, when it is but too plain that moſt of thoſe provocations abound among us; which, according to the meaſures ſettled in his word, and the hiſtory of his providence, are uſed to uſher in publick calamities. Is there not a remarkable *increaſe of ſinful men, to augment the fierce anger of the Lord?* Numb. xxxii. 14. Is there not a viſible degeneracy in moſt, who have made pretenſions to religion, or have had the greateſt advantages for it by a pious education? How bold is impiety and profaneſs, and immoralities of the groſſeſt kind? How contemptuouſly is the Goſpel treated by many? For which it might juſtly be *taken from us, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* All this is prodigiouſly aggravated by the repeated favours of providence; ſuch as the bleſſing we remember on this day; have not too many even of thoſe, who profeſs a value for it, behaved as if they thought themſelves *delivered to work abominations.?* We have had ſome cutting rebukes of providence too; but have we returned to him that ſmote us? Certainly we have uncommon reaſon to adore the goodneſs of God in our exemption as yet from this ſtroke.

5. Let us be in a readineſs to bear the hand of God without murmuring and repining, if after all he ſhould lay it upon us. I would not unneceſſarily alarm you with the ſenſe of our danger: You are well apprized, that it is not over. I would therefore excite you to prepare to meet your God. That each of you in your perſonal capacities may be in ſuch a ſtate, as that if you ſhould fall under, and even fall by that awful viſitation, yet you may not *fall into the hands of the living God* for ever, as an offended and unreconciled God. Break off your ſins by repentance, and return to your heavenly Father thro' Chriſt, making ſupplication to your judge, and ſincerely devoting yourſelves to him in covenant; then you will have no occaſion to fear death in the moſt hideous form; for then *the world, or life, or death, or things preſent, or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Chriſt's, and Chriſt is God's,* 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

And having ſet our own ſouls in order, let us do all we can in our ſeveral places to avert the impending calamity. I mean not now, what may be proper by the meaſures of human prudence as a natural means of guarding againſt the infection; I hope the Legiſlature will be directed to the beſt meaſures of that kind. But I mean what we can do in a moral way, conſidering it as the viſitation of God, if it ſhall come. We cannot ſay, the ſentence is poſitive in our caſe, as it was in the caſe of *Iſrael.* Our long reſpite gives opportunity and encouragement to ſtand upon the breach. And it might

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be of great ſervice, if there were but a zeal excited to promote the reformation of manners. When the plague was broke out in the camp of *Iſrael*, as God's puniſhment for *the people's beginning to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab*, Numb. xxv. it is obſerved, that upon *Phineas's ſtanding up, and executing judgment* upon ſome of the moſt daring offenders, *the plague was ſtayed*, Pſal. cvi. 30. If there were a becoming ardor kindled in the breaſts of many, according to their ſtations, to diſcountenance and quell the rampancy of vice, might we not hope, that *the plague* in our caſe *might be prevented?* Let us mourn for the ſins, which we cannot amend. That may be of ſervice to ourſelves, if it ſhould not be ſo to the community, *Ezek.* ix. 4, 6. Let us make a penitent acknowledgment of our own ill deſerts. Self-juſtification may haſten and imbitter the calamity: But if we juſtify God in the utmoſt ſeverities, and own ourſelves to have no refuge but in his mercy; if there be fervent and united prayers ſent up to God, if we continue inſtant in them, while the rod is kept hovering over us, *who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we periſh not?*

But if at laſt God ſhould not be intreated, let us be in a poſture of ſoul, ready to bear his indignation with humble ſubmiſſion, and hope in his mercy. With hope, that he will be with us in the trial; either to ſecure us from the *noiſom peſtilence*, when *a thouſand may fall at our ſide, and ten thouſand at our right*

right hand; or to ſupport and comfort us, if the viſitation ſhould reach us; and either to carry us thro' it ſafe to heaven, or to pluck us as a brand out of the burning. With hope, that if there be many penitents and interceſſors among us, God will mitigate his hand, and ſhorten the publick exerciſe: That he will ſanctify it to be a refining fire: And that if he ſee fit we ſhould for a ſeaſon fall into *his merciful hand*, he will continue to preſerve our nation and our poſterity from falling into the hands of cruel and unreaſonable men.

6. This ſubject confirms our obligation to *pray for kings, and for all that are in authority over us*, according to the apoſtolical precept, 1 *Tim.* ii. 2. From a ſenſe of intereſt, as well as of duty. For our own ſakes, *that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives under them*, it concerns us to pray to God to keep them from all provoking offences, from every wrong ſtep in government: And that at all times they may know and purſue the things that make for our peace. Now in particular, when our Parliament is convened, and the moſt proper meaſures for the national ſafety in this time of the danger of the infection, are recommended to their conſideration by his Majeſty, and are like to make ſo conſiderable a part of their debates; ſurely the concern, which every one of us in particular, and our country in general, may have in their determinations, ſhould make us earneſt in our daily intreaties to God, that he will counſel our counſellors, and teach our ſenators wiſdom.

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7. From the mercy of God, even when his correcting hand is upon a people, we ſhould learn ſympathy and compaſſion towards the afflicted. We ſhould be of this temper towards thoſe who are now ſuffering adverſity in the places of infection, who are either actually ſeized, or every moment in apprehenſion of being ſo. Let our prayers be ſerious and affectionate for their welfare in ſoul and body. Our ſympathy with them may this way reach them to advantage, when we have no other way of being ſerviceable in their diſtreſs. If the calamity ſhould come among us, there will be room for a great deal of charitable aſſiſtance from thoſe who are able to give to the poor and needy. And, in the mean while, none of us can need to know afflicted objects enow, by relieving of whom we ſhall reſemble our father in heaven, being merciful as he is merciful.

F I N I S.

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